

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2024



This newsletter will include some important news.

Funding has become an important issue for Diss Museum. By the time of our annual general meeting in May, Friends will be invited to vote on a proposed change to the organisation of the museum, aimed at improving the way in which it operates. The Friends of Museum and the Diss Museum charity all have the same objectives and we feel it makes sense to combine our efforts in one organisation.

- The first two sections of the newsletter will describe what happened last year, followed by what you can expect when the museum reopens this year.
- The next section will describe the financial situation of the museum, and what we need to-do to ensure its survival.
- Finally Museum Manager, Basil Abbott, will describe why we should all embrace difference when considering how to display our exhibits.

WHAT WE DID LAST YEAR

Grand Re-opening March 2023

We re-opened in March with a showbiz themed parade through the town and a special display in the museum.

Museum manager Basil Abbott said: “We had more than 50 people on what was a beautiful morning parade.

“We had the Scouts dressed as Indiana Jones, we also had people in David Copperfield and Casablanca outfits.’

It marked the 50th anniversary of the closure of Diss cinema, the New Picture House. The cinema themed display sparked happy memories and many people reminisced about their youthful antics on social media or while visiting the museum.



Photo Craig Bradshaw

Ghost Walk August

Diss Ghost walk brings spooky stories to life as it uncovers the town's history

Spooky anecdotes from Diss Museum sparked an inaugural, spirited ghost walk around the town.

Guided by museum manager Basil Abbott, more than 60 people were introduced to some of the town's most interesting ghost stories, with actors taking on the role of key characters.

The crowd learned about strange sounds and sightings in the market place, before meeting historical characters Robert Carleton, the last publicly hanged man in Diss; and Tudor rector and poet John Skelton.

Actors from Diss Ghost Tour pictured:

Heidi Goldsmith, Basil Abbott (Tour Leader), Pauline Groves (Matilda Fitz Walter, said to have been poisoned by King John), Peter Lewis (John Betjeman), Gary Alexander (Thomas Paine) and Madeline Lees (Mrs Gudgeon).

Picture: Mecha Morton

Murders from medieval times onwards were investigated, as the tour went through the churchyard and up the Heritage Triangle to Beehive Yard, taking in the history of the St. Nicholas Chapel, The Greyhound, Corn Hall and Tudor House.

The tour ended with a glowstick lit procession back to the museum for refreshments.

Mr Abbott said, "We were surprised by the response and could have sold out three times over – but we had to limit the numbers for safety. It was entertaining, a vivid local history lesson and a money-spinner for the museum.

"We have had many requests to repeat the tour and we hope to be able to do so at some point.

"There were many positive comments on social media, with people describing the tour as a fabulous and full of

interesting characters, and praising it as a wonderful evening with everyone performing their roles very well.

"My thanks to everyone involved in this

marvelous tour about the famous and infamous of our town. It was absolutely excellent."

The tour was held in partnership with Eastern Region Media and funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Article Craig Bradshaw, courtesy of Diss Express



Burston Rally September

Basil set up his regular stall (this is his 15th year), at the Burston Rally and made £400 for the Museum from selling bottled Burston Strike Ale.



He attracts the crowds with his Cockney market patter of – “Ere we are, lady, Burston Strike Ale, ‘airs on chest guaranteed!” It is amazing how many people will grin, come over and buy, when they were not even going to look at what was on the stall.

Transport Fayre September



Derek Allen of Dad’s Army re-enactors

Picture: Mark Bullimore Photography 2023

We are very grateful to Peter Hyde of the Heritage Triangle Trust, he provided a UXB, which was actually created from a real training bomb.

He arranged all the signage and made it look like the bomb was buried in the pavement. Two Dad’s Army re-enactors came from Thetford Museum which really added to the atmosphere. Lots of children, and some adults enjoyed sitting in the jeep.

Exhibits 2023

It is not just the exhibits but the stories behind them which make museums fascinating.

The lace collar on display would have only been affordable for the wealthiest members of Edwardian Society, well out of the reach of the women who made it. The Diss Lace Association was set up to provide incomes for women who were struggling to make ends meet. The collar would have taken 200 hours to make and would sell for equivalent today of £1,000. They made a beautiful lace handkerchief, which was presented to Princess Mary (on the occasion of her wedding in 1912).

A more humble trimming was on the wedding dress of Ethel Barber and Walter Hunt who married in 1912. Ethel, who worked as a servant, was one of ten children of a boilermaker. Walter was a railway clerk. Ethel kept many mementos of her wedding, including her dress, hair comb, photos and bills for the horse drawn carriages.

Francis Cupiss, a Diss vet, achieved international fame with his horse balls – pills to treat diseases of the liver and improve wellbeing in horses, sheep and cattle.

Another exhibit showed working conditions in the Brush Factory, an important local employer. They opened in 1836 and closed in 1988.

A popular display was devoted to the revolutionary thinker Thomas Paine, who worked in the town as a corset maker before going on to greater things. Rather unexpectedly, the display included the philosopher’s death mask.

So what else was new?

We realised that while some visitors were happy to browse undisturbed, others appreciated more information. To add to their experience, we produced a free colour leaflet giving more information about the newer exhibits.

We also increased our efforts to attract child visitors, particularly in the school holidays (although youngsters are always welcome). We promoted a quiz based on the exhibits, with the prize of a free book; encouraged access to the doll's house and discovery corner, and produced a children's leaflet. We intend to find more ways to engage with children in 2024 and to engage with the local schools.

The Community Cabinet is set up for people to display their own collections, which do not need to have a local theme.

However the hit of the season was extremely close to home: a display of treasures (and some junk) excavated by metal detectorists from fields near Diss. The two detectorists, Joe Edwards-Gill and Nick Bateman, came to the museum on two Saturdays to discuss their addictive (in a good way) hobby. Although Joe is the more experienced detectorist, Nick has proved luckier with the more valuable finds. Joe gave an entertaining talk at the Bowls Club about how he doesn't mind this! Believe it if you can. Even better, they didn't charge a speaker's fee.

The Detectorists are back for 2024, and have generously donated a 'Day of Detectoring' which we will be raffling, more details to follow.

1st Friday Meetings 2023

Thanks to Mike Clarke, we had a great mix of subjects for 2023 all very interesting and some had fantastic attendances.

These are loyally supported by Friends and the most popular events are of a local nature, so Mike has concentrated on booking subjects of local interest this year, please see pages 7 & 8 for the 2024 programme. We still need a speaker for August – so if you have any suggestions please get in touch.

Our special December event with Ray Hubbard, was a great success and attracted a lot of non-members. As it was just before his 90th birthday, he was presented with a cake and a bottle of whiskey, while the audience sang Happy Birthday.

StrollPoster18#1

2024 Friends of Diss Museum 2024

THE STROLL Around Diss

Introducing you to our lovely market town – not just a guided tour! Learn about some of the old buildings, the town's history, some of its famous people and a lot of interesting things about Diss.



Fodimus Maximus says:
'You'll see The Angels
and a Flying Pig!'

£5 per person

Children, accompanied only
Under 12yrs free
STROLL TIME:- app. 1 1/2 hours

MARCH TO OCTOBER
One person or a Group

**Advanced booking only –
A day and time to suit you**

Please phone David Young
01379 642168 or email:
fodimus@gmail.com

Start and finish at the Museum
Market Square IP22 4AB

**Remember... we put the ROLL into the STROLL
for those who rely upon wheels to get around!**

What to expect when the museum opens

Displays for 2024

Let no one say that they've been there and seen that. There are a host of new things to see this year. Look out for:

- Intriguing finds from an attic in Mount Street and a scary health remedy.
- Fair Green Post Office: 1962 - 2002, thankfully pre-dating the horrors of Horizon.
- Information about our own Dad's Army in Diss.
- What it was like to go shopping in 1949.
- Memories of Alma Electronic.

The main exhibit is a case featuring the history of Diss Town Football Club. It shows the evolution of the colours and strip, the war years, famous players and the FA Vase success of 1994, on the 30th anniversary. Loans include items from former Diss, Ipswich and England striker Trevor Whymark.

Wall panels trace the history of the South Norfolk constituency, from its Conservative and Liberal days in the late 19th century, to the Labour victories in the 1920s and 1945, votes for women and the Conservative consolidation since the 1950s.

The exhibit depicting the philosopher (and troublemaker) Thomas Paine has been expanded. The timeline from his journey from corset maker in Diss to author of the 'Rights of Man' runs from Thetford to Diss and on to Sussex, London, America and Paris, before his return to America.

Diss very own detectorists are back by popular demand, they have assembled a new display of their fascinating finds.

A History of Diss in 30 Objects

I am really excited for the opportunity to curate a display for the 2024 season, having previously prepared displays for the Community Cabinet and the Corn Hall.

I enjoy displays themed around "A History in a number of Objects". It has allowed me to explore a much wider historical range, to tell the history of Diss.

Exploring the variety of objects that the museum holds in its Collection including dinosaur bones and prehistoric hand axes right through to really modern objects from the Covid pandemic, has been very interesting.

My case is divided into sections which offer natural breaks will be: 250 million years ago until the 15th century; 1622 - 1937 which includes the Diss Lace Association (1901 - 1937); the two World Wars through to the 60's; and then the 70's up to present day. I am also using the display board behind the case to further research my chosen artefacts and present this information in an interesting way to visitors. I hope to show what links the history of Diss into wider national and even international events using objects such as Roman and French coins.

Hopefully visitors enjoy this display as much as I have putting it together, to illustrate the range of history in Diss and how it has not always been the backwater it can appear to be today.

Eve Coates Museum Volunteer

GRAND OPENING

Saturday 16th March at 11.00 am

Once again, the museum's Grand Opening will be marked by a procession. As it is election year, the theme is a light hearted look at the local and national politics. It won't be long winded. Speakers from the major parties will have just three minutes on the soap box to put their case. Don't be surprised if you spot suffragettes, fascists, communists and rogue figures from the past. We are hoping to attract a crowd.



Grand Opening Procession Participants needed

Would you like to be part of the opening procession? It is great fun and brings great publicity for the museum.

You don't have to be a Friend of Diss Museum. Basil has quite an array of costumes if you *'don't have anything to wear'*. Basil would love to hear from you: basabbott@yahoo.co.uk

Opening Times 2024

The museum will continue to open from 11 am to 3 pm Monday to Saturday, from Saturday 16 March until Saturday 2 November.

Please get in touch if you would like to become a volunteer. Shifts last only two hours and it's a great way of meeting people.

New for 2024

- Credit card reader – this will definitely be in place for 2024 season.
- Prize draw 2024 - We are planning a grand prize draw this year, with the main prize being 'A Day out with a Detectorist', other prizes to be announced.

Proposed merger of Friends with Trustees

A working party is looking into whether it would be of benefit if the Friends of Diss Museum and Trustees merged.

If you are interested we will be voting at the Friends AGM on Friday 3rd May.

Only fully paid up members are allowed to vote at the AGM. Please come along and have your say.

Fundraising

Diss Museum is running at a loss. Our income is not enough to cover our expenses. We have reserves, but these are needed to cover unexpected contingencies e.g. major repairs to the building. In the past, museums have been able to rely on grants from governments and local authorities. This is no longer the case.

We are working on finding new sources of income. Meanwhile the museum is in need of refurbishment, with better display cabinets and lighting (although we will make sure the building retains its quirky charm). One pillar on the museum is badly rotted and in urgent need of replacement. It is likely that the other six will need some attention soon.

We need to recruit more Friends: we lost a significant number during the Covid years, we would be grateful if you could help us with this. The museum is an important part of the town's heritage and belongs to us all – and to our children.

Regrettably we have had to increase the Friends subscription from £7 to £10 per person, or £15 per household. We would be grateful if Friends would arrange to donate by standing order if possible. Diss Museum Lloyds bank sort code is 30-99-50. Account number 17797563.

We have decided not to increase the admission charge for First Friday meetings (Friends £3 and Guests £5), but we will be asking for a small donation for refreshments. Museum Entry will continue to be free.

Becoming a Friend entitles you to reduced entrance fees, eligibility to vote at the AGM and two Newsletters per year. For more information about the Museum or to become a Friend please contact fodimus@gmail.com

Annual Subscriptions New rate

Due 1st April 2024:

Single: £10.00 Household: £15.00

Annual subscriptions shall become due on the first day of April. Members whose subscriptions are not paid by the start of the AGM shall forfeit their right to vote. Members whose subscriptions are twelve months in arrears shall be automatically excluded from membership.

Please note if you have previously paid by BACS, the account number and sort code has now changed to Lloyds Bank as below:

Ways to pay: BACS, cheque, cash or Standing Order: **Diss Museum Lloyds Bank sort code is 30-99-50. Account no 17797563.**

Speaker Programme 2024

All meetings will be held at Diss & District Bowls Club, Lower Denmark Street, Diss IP22 4BE. This is located behind the Cock Inn on Fair Green. Plenty of free parking. Start time 2.00pm.

Friday 5th April – Keith Rackham

'50 Years a Stonemason'

Friday 3rd May - A short AGM* will be held before

Pip Wright 'The Local Rag- our history through the local press'

**Free entry for people attending the AGM only.*

Friday 7th June – Basil Abbott

'The Roydon Riots'

Friday 5th July – John Johnson Allen

'How the Armistice Came About'

Friday 2nd August –

We would like to book something special so please let us have your ideas.

Friday 6th September– Tim Holt-Wilson

'The Lost Beasts of Norfolk & Suffolk'

Thanks to all the Volunteers who give up their free time to help run the museum and participate in events.

We wouldn't have a museum if it wasn't for the Volunteers!

Friday 4th October – Tony Diamond
['The Ipswich Murders'](#)

Friday 1st November- Jonathan Dutton
[The 1940s House – An Art Thrown Away](#)

Friday 1st December- David & Avril
[The CHRISTMAS QUIZ](#)

Thanks to Mike Clarke, our Programme Secretary for this great mix of speakers. Mike has carried out this task for over 12 years and has now decided to step down. We are truly grateful to him for all his hard work. If anyone would like to take over this role, please get in touch. fodimus@gmail.com

Friends of Diss Museum Committee – FODIMUS

Chairman: Basil Abbott 07961 231695

Vice Chair: Mike Clarke 01379 674597

Programme Secretary: Vacancy

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Facebook – Diss Museum page –
Please 'like' and follow

Charitable Incorporate Organisation CIO No. 1168112

Being Unusual

Two pieces of writing have recently struck me by their relevance to what we do at the museum. A Finnish philosopher, writing about finding the meaning in life, said that one way was to become an expert and share your knowledge. One of the best ways to serve others is to find something that meets three requirements:

1. You're good at it.
2. It excites you.
3. It has a positive impact on others.

Once you've found a job or a hobby that makes you feel fulfilled, put all your focus into becoming an expert in it. Then share it with your community. In a book on transforming leadership, 'Glue' by John Dore, the author talks about the importance of being unusual. (Glue entails an ability to **galvanise**, actively **listen**, be **unusual** and to **engage** others.)

"If listening is your super-power, then being unusual is your super-hero costume. It is effortlessly worn, with a few frayed edges and creases, but your difference from the norm is going to be noticed by others and make you stand out a bit. The power of being unusual should not be underestimated, and this is not about wacky, subversive or extraordinary difference. The simple fact that a leader invests time and effort to create glue will mark them out from the others.

"Unusual is important because unusual is rare and therefore gets noticed. Being unusual intrigues peers, colleagues and team members, and makes leaders memorable. Be reassured though, the bar for being unusual is not particularly high. You do not need to look, act or behave in a crazy, oddball contrarian way. You do not need to cartwheel into the office wearing a scuba-diving suit while whistling La Marseillaise and high-fiving the new recruits. You just have to deviate in small ways from the norm."

by *Basil Abbott*